

The Revised Organic Guarantee System

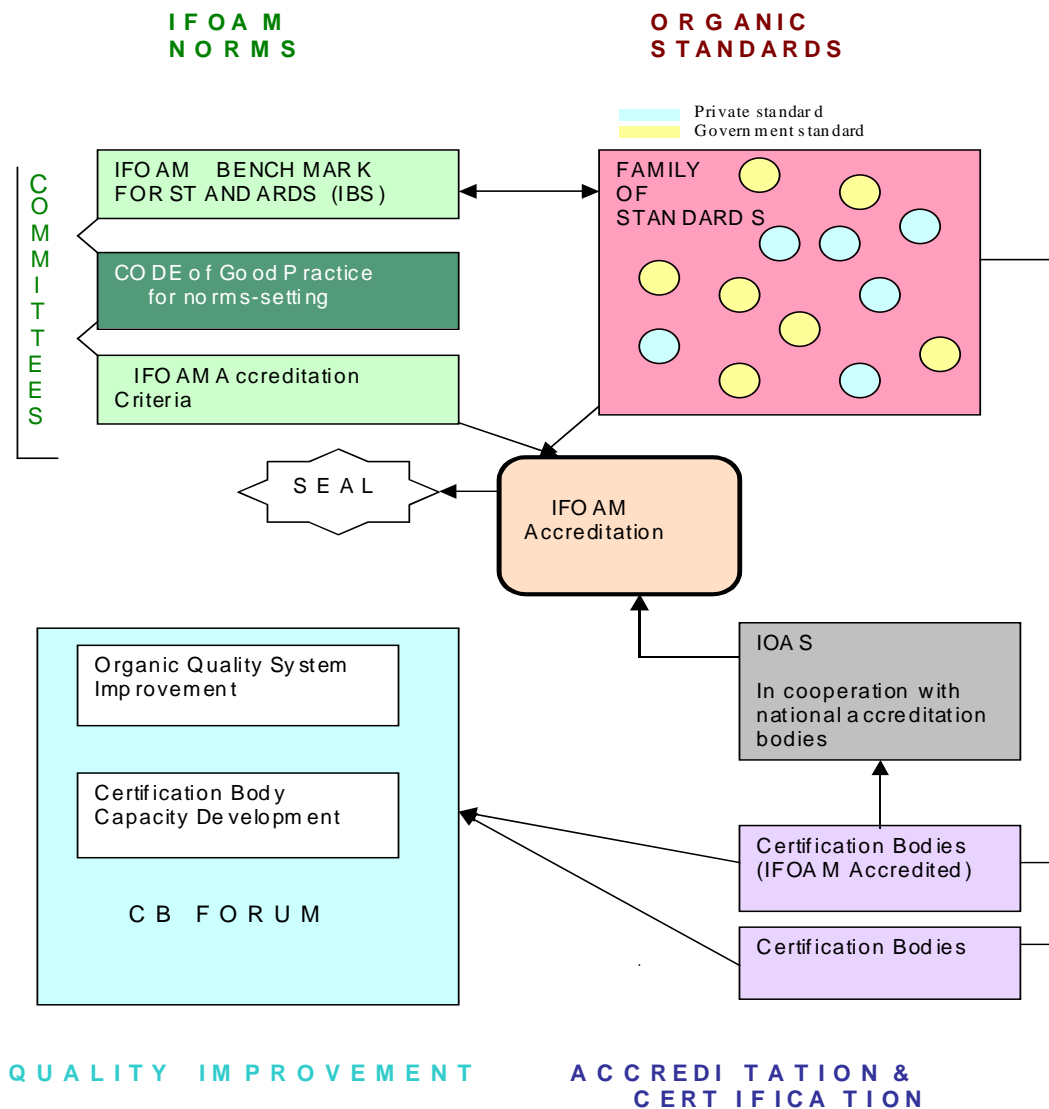
IFOAM has been revising the Organic Guarantee System (OGS) with the aim of creating more access to it. IFOAM decided that the OGS, while always upholding the integrity of organic agriculture, should aim to facilitate trade and be able to accommodate all serious organic certification bodies and their clients.

Elements of the Revised Organic Guarantee System

The elements and relationships in the Revised Organic Guarantee System can be viewed in the following graphic. Please refer to this graphic while reading the following explanation of the revised OGS.

REVISED IFOAM ORGANIC GUARANTEE SYSTEM

UNITING THE ORGANIC WORLD



The IFOAM Norms

The norms that govern entrance to the IFOAM accreditation the system will be made more accessible. IFOAM owns two norms, which are developed according to the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Standards Setting.

The IAC: The IFOAM Accreditation Criteria (IAC) is a set of requirements for the operation of organic certification bodies. All certification bodies in the IFOAM Accreditation Program must comply with the IAC. IFOAM is currently evaluating how to revise the IAC for greater accessibility. We need to learn more about how the last revision of this norm in 2005 is functioning and the extent to which it is accessible for certification bodies. We are also following the development of an “International Requirement for Organic Certification Bodies” by the International Task Force for Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (ITF). This document could be accepted by government sector as a tool for equivalence and approval of certification bodies for the purpose of imports. If this ITF norm becomes widely referenced by governments, it could be advantageous for IFOAM to consider how to harmonize it and the IAC.

The IBS: The IBS is a set of requirements for organic production and processing. The current IFOAM Basic Standard has been revised and transformed into the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards, which continues to carry the acronym IBS, but is more open and less prescriptive than the current IFOAM Basic Standard because it serves a new primary role to foster equivalence. The new IBS draws a line between organic and conventional systems; and it accommodates diversity in agro-ecosystems, infrastructure and stage of organic system development around the world. The Benchmark can be used as a general guidance to standards development, but it is not prescriptive. It will also continue to function in IFOAM Accreditation, and its more open nature should help the IFOAM Accreditation Program to also become more open. Furthermore, a major aim for the new IBS is as a tool for developing a large “family” of organic standards that can be considered equivalent in fulfilling IFOAM Principles. The Principles are the [IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture](#) and these are further elaborated in the IFOAM Benchmark for Organic Standards. The Benchmark also presents objectives (outcomes) that organic standards must achieve in order fulfill the Principles. Requirements in each chapter further guide standards setting bodies, and when there is a need to clearly draw a line between organic and conventional systems, these requirements sometimes specify specific practices in production and/or processing that are either mandatory or prohibited. The Introduction to the IBS explains the structure and function of the new IBS in more detail.

The Family of Standards

IFOAM aims to recognize many organic standards in the family of standards. The vision is to include not only private standards but also government standards. In the graphic of the Revised OGS, both government and private organic standards are shown in the Family of Standards. In order to realize this vision, it is important that the Benchmark is able to include those private and government standards around the world that are currently functioning and generally recognized as organic sector standards, for example, the USDA National Organic Program Standard, the EU Regulation (currently 2092/91),

the India National Standard (government), the Italian Organic Standards (private). The IFOAM Benchmark for Standards aims to be inclusive of these and many other currently functioning organic standards. The aim is to build up this Family of Standards to eventually include most of the government and private standards.

The Family of Standards and IFOAM Accreditation: The Family of Standards should enable IFOAM Accreditation to be more accessible. Applicant certification bodies may either opt for having their referenced standard(s) evaluated during the accreditation process, or they may use one or several of the approved standards in the Family as their scope for IFOAM Accreditation. Because standards in the Family have already been approved, the evaluation process is streamlined. Also, certification bodies certifying to government standards will now have a means to access IFOAM Accreditation, whereas previously they did not.

The Family of Standards and International Equivalence: The IFOAM process for developing the IFOAM Family of Standards may also provide an example and means for governments to consider how to recognize each other's standards as equivalent. The IFOAM Policy 42 for Approval of Certification Standards (which was also revised to be more accessible during the OGS Revision) is currently a reference for the ITF as this task force considers in 2007 developing an international equivalency tool that can apply throughout private and government organic guarantee systems. Policy 42 can be downloaded from the [OGS Policies Library of the IFOAM](#) website.

Access of Certification Bodies to the OGS

The OGS is more accessible to Certification Bodies in two ways (see OGS Revision Graphic). The first way is through IFOAM Accreditation. IFOAM Accreditation should be more accessible to CBs because they now have the option to use one or more of the standards in the Family of Standards for accreditation instead of having their "own" standard evaluated as compliant to the IBS. This can reduce their costs. IFOAM Accreditation may also be more accessible because in the future, there will be an expanded cooperation of IOAS and other accreditation bodies (the "National Accreditation Bodies") to provide IFOAM accreditation. This decision was taken by IFOAM's World Board in March, 2007, and details for implementing it are still being worked out between IFOAM and the IOAS.

The other way that CBs may now participate in the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System is through the Certification Body Forum. The Revision adds to the OGS Capacity Development for certification bodies and Quality Improvement of the general system of organic certification (see OGS Graphic). IFOAM has begun this expansion by initiating the Certification Body Forum, which is open to all serious organic certification bodies worldwide. By bringing these bodies together in a platform for network and exchange, IFOAM can assist the whole certification system to improve and harmonize, and make an avenue for individual CBs to develop their capacity through networking and problem-solving with other CBs. In turn, harmonization and capacity development can enable more CBs to qualify for IFOAM Accreditation. As a timely example of this, the CB Forum can provide a means for CBs to assess how the whole certification system is



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implementing grower group certification, a “hot” topic in the wake of the USDA’s recent announcement that such an approach to certification does not comply with the NOP. The Forum provides a means for improving and harmonizing approaches to group certification if this becomes important for solving the problem of access by grower groups to US markets.